



# Rashid Abdu

Physician

## Yemen-Born Doctor Makes Good, Brings Village Along

Rashid Abdu recalls a job interview that changed his life. He was a 12-year-old from a small, poor Yemeni village and met the U.S. consul in Aden. The consul needed a houseboy.

Abdu reports, "He said, 'What do you want to do?' I said, 'I want to work, go to school and become a doctor.' And the following day, I enrolled in my first class, a first-grader in a Catholic school."

With the help of the consul and other Americans, Abdu pursued his improbable dream. He caught up to his age group in school. He went to a U.S. college on a full scholarship, and he won admission to medical school.

In the summer after college, he returned to Yemen, and his parents urged him to stay. They told him that they had his first cousin reserved for him to marry. "This education nonsense is going too far," he recalls them saying.

But instead of marrying, he borrowed money to get his nine brothers educated. And he met with the king of Yemen, who offered to pay Abdu's tuition for medical school. The king wrote a note on a torn piece of paper for his officials, "Do what has to be done as it should be done."

"That was it. That was my scholarship," Abdu said.

Abdu tells his story well, both in conversation and in his book *Journey of a Yemeni Boy*. He also has lived it well, helping others — not just as a surgeon in Youngstown, Ohio, but as a volunteer advising the Yemeni minister of health, teaching Yemeni medical students and treating patients in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and on missions in Mexico and Guatemala.

One volunteer effort had a special personal meaning. In 1971, doctors in Yemen refused to perform needed surgery on Abdu's mother, saying she wouldn't survive. Abdu returned to Yemen to operate, and his mother lived 28 years more.

"My brothers were telling me that everybody in the village wanted their sons to be just like Rashid," he said. "And in the ensuing years, that village, that tiny little village, produced 20 physicians."



Abdu's largest project is coming to fruition: an \$8 million comprehensive breast care center to open in Youngstown in October 2011. The disease killed his second wife, Joanie, in 1994; the center will carry her name. For many years, Abdu has devoted the bulk of his income toward its creation.

"We're trying to get the community what the community needs badly," he said. "We're going to be busy."

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Abdu



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Zewail



Tlaib

**Rashid Abdu**, Physician

**Ahmed Ahmed**, Comedian

**Moustapha Akkad**, Film Director

**Michael DeBakey**, Heart Surgeon

**Farouk El-Baz**, Geologist

**Gaida**, Singer

**Kahlil Gibran**, Artist and Poet

**Joseph Haiek**, Publisher

**Salma Hayek**, Actress

**Casey Kasem**, Radio Broadcaster

**DJ Khaled**, Rap Music Artist

**Khalid Khannouchi**, Marathon Runner

**Ferial Masry**, Community Activist

**Christa McAuliffe**, Teacher in Space

**Naomi Shihab Nye**, Author

**Ameen Rihani**, Poet

**Edward Said**, Author and Activist

**Kareem Salama**, Singer

**Betty Shamieh**, Playwright

**Rashida Tlaib**, Politician

**Elias Zerhouni**, Medical Vanguard

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